

THE
GREAT WORK



THE GREAT WORK

LESSON ONE

THE GREAT WORK, often termed the *Magnum Opus*, is thus defined by Eliphas Levi:

"The *magnum opus* is pre-eminently the creation of man by himself, that is, the full and complete conquest which he can make of his faculties and his future; it is pre-eminently the perfect emancipation of his will which . . . assures full power over the Great Magical Agent. This Magical Agent, which the old Hermetic philosophers disguised under the name of the *First Matter* of the *Magnum opus*, determines the species of modifiable substance, and metallic transmutation, as well as the universal medicine, can be really attained by its means. This is no hypothesis, it is a fact already tested, and rigorously demonstrable."

Thus we may understand the Great Work to be the secret operation described in the books of the true alchemists. In order to understand the work, we must know what alchemy really is. To arrive at this understanding, we begin with the commonly accepted exoteric definition of the Hermetic Art, given in Webster's *New International Dictionary*:

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"Alchemy,--The medieval chemical science, whose great objects were the transmutation of the baser metals into gold, and the discovery of the universal cure for diseases and means of indefinitely prolonging life."

So far as it goes, this definition is true. Full success in the Great Work does give these who attain it extraordinary power over physical condition, enabling them to achieve the practical results of metallic transmutation, cure of all diseases, and tremendous prolongation of the span of man's physical existence. Yet the definition is misleading, because it makes it appear that the various operations of alchemy are directed primarily to these objectives, whereas the truth is that the Great Work, as Eliphas Levi says, has to do, first of all, with man himself.

The Philosophers' Stone, which is the Hermetic Symbol for the things made by the Great Work, is not a physical substance manufactured in a chemical laboratory. It is a transmuted and perfected state of human personality. By means of this transformed personality, the true Stone of the Wise, are effected the works of power which give an alchemical adept command over all forms

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and forces of the physical plane.

It is true that success in the Great Work enables an alchemist to transmute metals and cure diseases by means of a physical thing, external to his body. Yet he cannot *make* this transmuting agent, nor perfect the Universal Medicine, unless he himself has *become* the true Stone. The records of Hermetic Art include the histories of several persons, not themselves adepts, who by one means or another came into possession of the external physical agent we have just mentioned. Sometimes they received it as a gift, sometimes they found a certain quantity of it. Always they were the worse for their unmerited acquisition of unusual power. While their supply of the agent lasted, they effected marvelous cures, and performed metallic transmutations. Because they could not *make* the substance whereby they achieved these results, not having *become* the Hidden Stone, when their supply was exhausted they could not replenish it. Moreover, since they had not undergone the inner transmutation which enables one to employ the external agent wisely, their foolish display of power brought disaster upon them.

Alchemical books are hard to understand because they are intention-

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ally cryptic. They are written in veiled language, full of obscure symbols. Their authors use enigmas, ciphers, blinds and various other devices, in order to conceal their true meaning from uninitiated readers. True sages, Jean d'Espagnet tells us, never actually lie, but he adds: "Truth lies hid in obscurity; for Philosophers never write more deceitfully--than when plainly, nor more truly--than when obscurely."

The true import of alchemical literature is the harder to discover because there are three classes of alchemical books. The first class comprises the works of genuine adepts, links in the chain of oral tradition which transmits Hermetic Science from one generation to another. The second class consists of books written by persons who misunderstood the writings of true adepts, and supposed them to be no more than explanations of processes whereby physical metals might be transmuted by chemical means. To the third class belong worthless productions of charlatans who had nothing to tell, but wrote their spurious volumes in order to make gold by the process of extracting it from the purses of their dupes.

Fortunately, the oral tradition of Hermetic Science has never died

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out. Adepts live today who are as fully versed in the mysteries of the Great Art, as fully skilled in its practical application, as were any whose names have come down to us from the past.

From such living wise men these instructions come to you, because the Builders of the Adytum form a link in the long chain of oral tradition. We are the happy possessors of keys to the cryptic meaning of the images and symbols of the true sages. We shall use those keys to give you a clear exposition of alchemical doctrine, free from many blinds which were necessary in less liberal periods of history.

We do not pretend to reveal all the secrets of Hermetic Science. There is much that we are obliged to hold in reserve. What we do communicate, however, is free from deliberate distortions of meaning.

What you read here is a faithful transmission of *received* knowledge. A great deal of it has been tested by the practice of those who are immediately responsible for putting it into your hands. We do not set ourselves up as adepts in alchemy, who have attained to the completion of the Great Work. We do claim to have definite experimental knowledge of the fact that these principles real-

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ly work. We enjoy the further privilege of having before us the example of living adepts who have completed the Great Work, and are in full possession of all the benefits accruing therefrom. It is really from them that this instruction comes to you.

Your own success in the Great Work does not depend on your acceptance of our claim. If you put the instruction itself to the tests of reason, intuition and experiment, you will demonstrate its truth. Furthermore, you will find out for yourself, long before you attain to the final goal of the Great Work, that there really is an Inner School of adepts, the custodians of the mysteries of Ageless Wisdom, and that these studies in Tarot and Hermetic Science originate in that Inner School.

The greater number of alchemical books now extant were written after the twelfth century, but the beginnings of the Great Art may be traced to a much earlier period. For example, a fundamental doctrine of alchemy is this:

"That which is above is as that which is below, and that which is below is as that which is above, for the performance of the miracles of the One Thing."

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These words, you will remember, are from *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes*. They are quoted again and again by alchemists. Tradition ascribes them to Hermes Trismegistus, and occult revery has run wild concerning the personality of that shadowy Egyptian adept. Sober scholarship, however, concludes that *The Emerald Tablet* is a comparatively modern work, composed long after the beginning of the Christian Era.

Yet its doctrine is much older, for it is stated explicitly in the Hindu *Katha Upanishad*. The *Katha Upanishad*, moreover, is by no means the only Indian book containing distinct expressions of alchemical doctrine. A little farther on, we shall see that India had a sect whose ideas were basically the same as those of some of the Western alchemists.

We shall see also that the objects of yoga and alchemy are the same. We shall find, too, that yogis and alchemists are agreed in their descriptions of phenomena. East may be East, and West West, but however far apart they may be in some respects, they do meet on the common ground of experience the East calls yoga, and the West, alchemy.

So far as can be learned, Jacob Boehme, the mystical alchemist of

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Goerlitz, Germany, never met a Hindu in the flesh; but when we read his *Mysterium Pansophicum*, we know that his words, based on his own direct perception of the inner nature of things, would offer little difficulty to an Eastern occultist. In the Fifth Text of this little treatise, the fourth paragraph says:

“And thus we are able to recognize an eternal substantiality of Nature, identical with water and fire, which are as it were mixed together; where then this gives a light-blue color, like the flash of fire; where it hath a form as a ruby mixed with crystal in one substance, or as yellow, white, red and blue, mingled in a dark water; where it is as blue in green, yet each hath its lustre and shines. And the water checks the fire, so that there is no consuming there, but an eternal essence or substance in two mysteries united one in another, and yet the distinction of two principles as two kinds of life.”

This may be mysterious enough to a reader who has no knowledge whatever concerning the subtler manifestations of the Life-power. Yet the colors mentioned are precisely those we find in Hindu books dealing with the *Tattvas*, or subtle principles behind the grosser forms of sense-

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perception which make up our awareness of the physical universe.

There is the mixture of red and white, or "ruby mixed with crystal in one substance." This we come upon again and again in the yogic descriptions of *Prana*. There is yellow, which yogis call the color of the *Prithivi Tattva*; white, which they associate with the *Apas Tattva*; red, which they assign to the *Tejas* or *Agni Tattva*; blue, the color they give to the *Vayu Tattva*; and the dark water, a deep bluish-green, which corresponds exactly to certain descriptions of what Hindus call the "mixing bowl of the elements, or *Akasha*, wherein the other *Tattvas* are mingled.

All these colors are mentioned in Rama Prasad's book, *Nature's Finer Forces*. They are spoken of also in Arthur Avalon's *Serpent Power*. The latter, however, is a work to be read with caution, because it is full of blunders, such as the list of colors of the *Tattvas* on page 143, which ascribes white to *Akasha* and "smoky" to *Vayu*. But the same list also attributes white to *Apas*, so that if we understand "smoky" to mean "bluish," the same colors are mentioned as those given by Jacob Boehme.

The point is that alchemists and

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yogis are speaking of something they have seen for themselves. They agree because they know the same fundamental realities, see the same things.

We do not know just when the earlier Upanishads were first put into writing, but it is generally agreed that they antedate, by several centuries, the Buddhistic period which began in the sixth century, B. C. Furthermore, we know that Indian literature was transmitted orally for a long time before it was written. Out of the distant past, then, we hear the voice of a Hindu wise man saying:

"As below so above, as above so below; he passes from death to death who finds here the least shadow of variety. There is no variety in THAT. It should be grasped by the mind alone. He, indeed, passes from death to death who finds here the least shadow of variety.'"

That the doctrines of alchemy were known in India long ago we learn from Swami Vivekananda, who writes:

"There was the sect called the *Rasayanas*. Their idea was that ideality, knowledge, spirituality and religion were all very right, but that the body was only an instrument by which to attain to all

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these. If the body broke now and then it would take so much more time to attain the goal. For instance, a man wants to practice Yoga, or wants to become spiritual. Before he has advanced very far he dies. Then he takes another body and begins again, then dies, and so on, and in this way much time will be lost in dying and being born again. If the body could be made strong and perfect we should have more time to become spiritual. So these *Rzsayanas* say, first make the body very strong, and they claim that this body can be made immortal. Their idea is that if the mind is manufacturing the body, and if it be true that each mind is only one particular outlet to that infinite energy, and that there is no limit to each particular outlet getting any amount of power, why is it impossible that we should keep our bodies all the time? We shall have to manufacture all the bodies we shall ever have. As soon as this body dies we shall have to manufacture another. If we can do that, why cannot we do that just here and now, without getting out? The theory is perfectly correct. If it is possible that we live after death, and make other bodies, why is it impossible that we should have the power of making bodies here, without entirely dissolving this

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body, simply changing it continually? They also thought that in mercury and sulphur was hidden the most wonderful power, and that by certain preparations of these a man could keep his body as long as he liked.''

--*Raja Yoga*, pages 207-208.

In 1879, Dr. William A. P. Martin, who had been a missionary in China, published an article in the *China Review*, offering evidence that alchemy was known and practiced in China at least three centuries before the Christian Era. He believed China to be the source of the alchemical doctrine, which passed thence to Byzantium and Alexandria, and so entered Europe. Dr. Martin cited many ancient texts to show the following points of similarity between Chinese alchemical literature and books written by Western adepts:

(1) The doctrine that there is a seed of metals; (2) the idea that all things contain an active principle whereby they may attain to a condition of higher development; (3) the fact that alchemy was perpetuated in China by oral tradition, supplemented by books written in figurative language; (4) the fact that in China, as in Europe, alchemy is inseparable from magic and astrology; (5) the combination of

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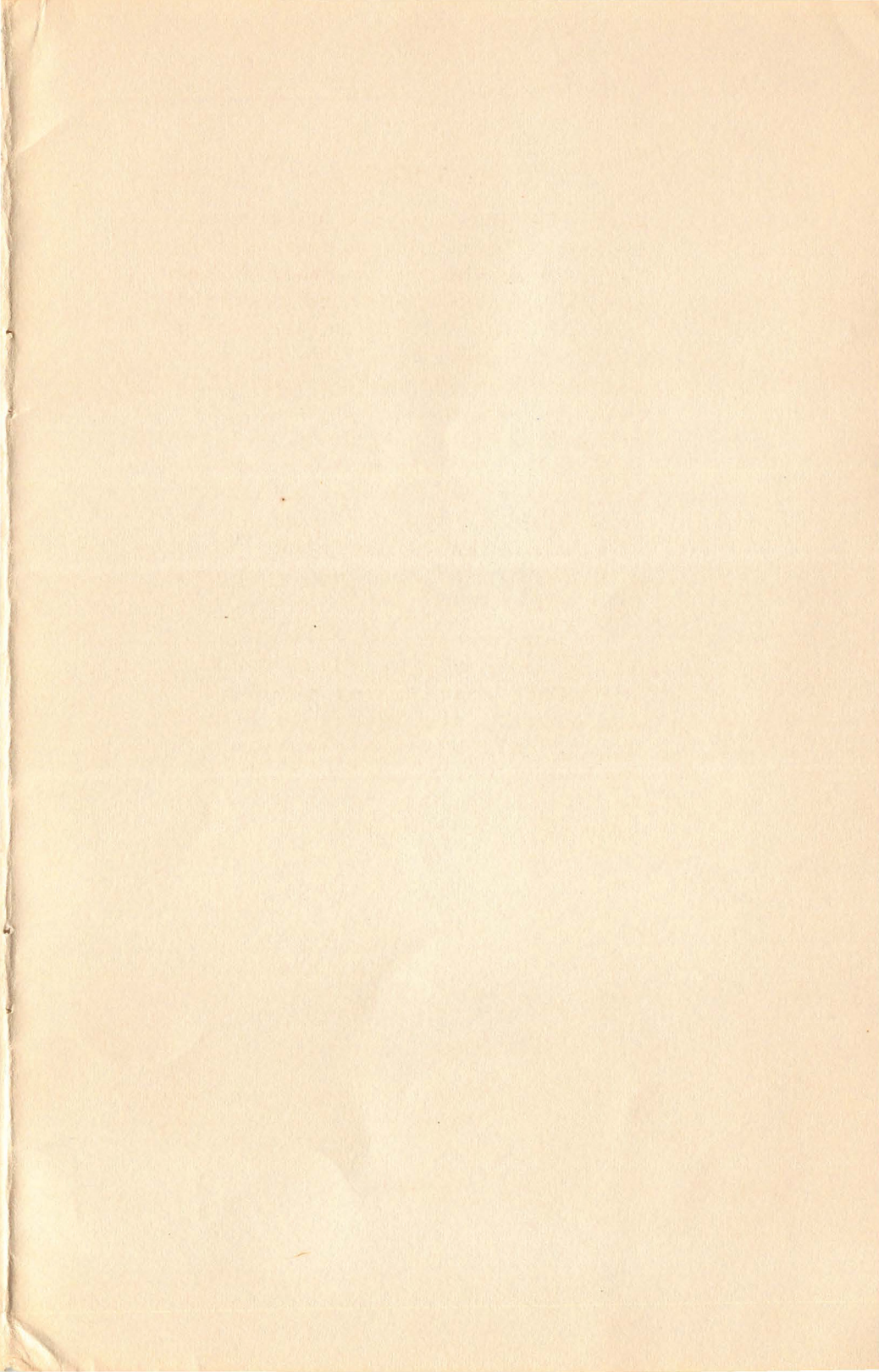
the idea of transmuting metals with that of making a universal medicine; (6) the estimation of the secret of making gold as being inferior to that of the Elixir of Life; (7) the inculcation of self-culture and self-discipline as being required for success in the work; (8) the concealment of the true matters of the work by names which were also used in the West, including lead, sulphur, mercury and cinnabar; (9) the doctrine that all metals are composite; (10) the presence in Chinese texts of the same symbolic terms which appear in the books of Western alchemists--such as, the "Radical Principle," the "Green Dragon," the "True Mercury," and so on; (11) the fact that there were two Alchemical processes, the first inward and spiritual, the second outward and material, resulting in the production of two elixirs, a greater and a lesser.

This account of Dr. Martin's essay is condensed from A. E. Waite's *Secret Tradition in Alchemy*. Dr. Waite does what he can to minimize the importance of this evidence that the Chinese worked at alchemy before it was known in the Western world, because it conflicts with D. Waite's endeavor to show

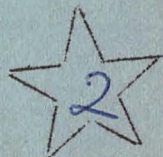
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that the greater part of Western alchemical writings were written by deluded men who had no other object than the satisfaction of a sordid lust for gold and the attainment of physical immortality. We find ourselves often in conflict with Dr. Waite's opinions, but we gladly acknowledge his merits as an indefatigable and successful miner for all sorts of information on esoteric subjects. Not the least of the treasures he has rescued from obscurity is this essay of Dr. Martin's.

In our next lesson we shall consider some of the clues to the enigmatic writings of the Western alchemists, the better to prepare you to follow the explanations of their cryptic doctrine, which will be considered at length, as we proceed with this course.



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LESSON TWO

WESTERN ALCHEMY may be traced to the days when Alexandria was a meeting-place for that group of members of the Inner School who later transferred their activities to Fez, and from the latter city issued the earliest versions of Tarot. Alchemical philosophy is tinged with ideas brought to Alexandria by wandering teachers from India, Persia and China. This accounts for the mixture of Hindu thought, Egyptian magic, and Greek philosophy in the Hermetic teaching veiled by the symbolism of alchemy and Tarot.

Besides these, there is the unmistakable influence of Hebrew esoteric tradition. This is mentioned by Zozimus, one of the early Greek alchemists, who says:

"There are two sciences and two wisdoms--one of the Egyptians and one of the Hebrews, the latter being rendered more solid by Divine Justice. Science and wisdom at their best rule over lower sciences and inferior wisdoms: they come down from remote ages. Their generation seeks nothing from material and corruptible bodies: it operates apart from foreign intervention, sustained

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by prayer and grace."

Yet the writings of Zozimus and other alchemists of his period abound in recipes for making the baser metals appear to be gold and silver. These recipes are the same as those in the *Leyden Papyrus*, which is a perfectly frank account of various devices for giving a false appearance of gold and silver to such metals as lead, copper and tin. From this the French writer, Berthelot, argues that alchemy began as fraud, and somehow the alchemists departed from this straightforward, if somewhat dishonest beginning, and began to dream of transmutation and philosophize upon it. Dr. Waite appears to embrace this view, perhaps with some reserves.

The truth is this: The sages do not lie, but often they do give recipes for the sort of false tinging we have described. He who tries out the recipes will get results of a sort, but not of the sort which is the true concern of the Great Work. In alchemical books of the earlier period, the sophistications of the false tingers were the blinds for the true work. He who knows how to read the books knows how to separate the subtle from the gross, the wheat of wisdom from the chaff of chemical recipes.

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Zozimus puts us on the track of the means to effect this separation when he speaks of the superiority of the Hebrew wisdom. Long after him came Paracelsus, who wrote:

"If you do not understand the use of the Cabalists and the old astronomers, you are not born by God for the Spagyric art, or chosen by Nature for the work of Vulcan, or created to open your mouth concerning Alchemical Arts."

These words from the second chapter of his *Tincture of the Philosophers* make it perfectly clear that, from the very beginning of Western alchemy to the day of one of its greatest European adepts, the tradition was continued that the esoteric doctrine of Israel includes the most important keys to the secret of the Great Art.

Yet there is only one treatise on alchemy which is definitely part of Qabalistic literature. This is a diffused, confused volume, not altogether without merit, but by no means one of the more important alchemical texts. It is named *Esh metzareph* (אש מצרף), or *Cleansing Fire*, and consists of fragments scattered through the first volume of Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabalah Denudata*. In 1714 these were collected and translated into English by an

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unknown student who called himself "The Lover of Philalethes." It was reprinted, with preface, notes and explanations, by "Sapere Aude," (Dr. W. Wynn Westcott), in 1894.

If we consider what Paracelsus means by "the use of the Cabalists," we shall have little difficulty in understanding why there are so few Qabalistic treatises on alchemy. The Holy Qabalah is a method for discovering the hidden spiritual meaning of the Bible. The subject-matter of the Qabalah is primarily the secret doctrine behind the letter of the Pentateuch.

Hence "the use of the Cabalists" is the method whereby the inner significance of the Scriptures of Israel is revealed. This method is based on correlations between numbers, letters and words.

Dr. Waite and many others dismiss this number-letter system, called Gematria, as being of no real value. The fact remains that the mystical theses of the Qabalah are developments of material worked out from the text of the Hebrew Scriptures by Gematria, Notarikon, and other procedures constituting what is known as the Literal Qabalah. This is made evident from beginning to end of the *Zohar*, now available in an

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excellent English translation, published by the Soncino Press.

Gematria is in disrepute because it has been abused. By perverting it, one may make any writing whatever yield any meaning one wishes to extract from it, and fanatics and charlatans have so misused the Literal Qabalah again and again.

Yet the fact remains that the same methods, employed with due discretion and discrimination, do give us keys to the true import of many passages in the Old Testament. More than this, there is not one of the philosophical theses so admired by writers like Dr. Waite, who dismisses Gematria altogether, which is not, as we have said, a development of material drawn from the Bible by this very method. It is as if one should profess admiration for gold, and at the same time declare the utter worthlessness of mining tools, when one proclaims the mystic value of Qabalistic intuition, and at the same time despises the methods by which the materials on which that intuition is exercised were gathered.

A more intelligent approach to Gematria has been made by Frederick Bligh Bond and Dr. Thomas Simcox Lea, whose works, though devoted to a study of the Greek Gematria in the

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New Testament, and in the Coptic Gnostic books, are full of valuable suggestions for the student of alchemy. They say:

“About the fifth century B. C. there began to appear in the Syro-Phoenician center east of the Mediterranean traces of a mode of writing in which the letters of the alphabet serve also the purpose of numerals. Though coming from this centre, the origin of the method is not believed to be Phoenician but to be traceable to a more Eastern source. From this parent influence two systems are derived. These are the Greek and the Hebrew. Both systems attained a high degree of development about the third century B. C. Both languages are constructed with great skill, and are evidently the work of highly instructed men animated by a clear purpose. Though compiled from older and far less perfect material, they represent something far more than the natural evolution of that material. They shew system, but they also shew peculiarities, sometimes having the appearance of intention, for which no adequate reason has yet been offered. Their alphabets, which are also numerals, exhibit unexplained features, some of which may be described as mysterious. It is

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scarcely reasonable to suppose that the element of chance has in any appreciable degree entered into their framing. And this is the more unlikely in that there is evidence of a contrary belief among these peoples, who shewed a peculiar reverence for their alphabets, ascribing to each letter its own mystical value, and, to the whole, a body of symbolic teaching in which the principles of Number, Sound, and also Form as connected with each letter, all played their part."

--*Preliminary Investigation*, pp. 5-6

In *The Apostolic Gnosis*, vol. 1, pp. 22-23, they write:

" . . . We make a very limited use of Roman letters as numbers, but for all ordinary purposes, the Arabic numerals which we employ are used for calculation only and are not associated in our thoughts with words or letters in our language.

"But if we had been trained as children to add, to subtract, to multiply and divide by means of the letters of our alphabet, how differently should we regard that alphabet. Instinct, habit, association of long standing would form an inevitable and indissoluble link between the letter and the number. The letters of a word would appear to us as a number, and the digits of

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certainly as it runs like a golden thread through the tapestry, strange and often outwardly repellant, of the Hebrew Scriptures. We must never forget that, after all, the New Testament is not less distinctly Hebrew than the rest of the Bible. It disguises itself a little in its Greek garb, but throughout the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles and the Book of Revelation, the thought is Hebraic, even though the words are Greek.

We find ourselves unable to accept the idea that the New Testament is a fragmentary corruption of a Wisdom Teaching now lost. Nor is it possible for one who has sufficient knowledge of Semitic turns of thought to draw any other conclusion from a perusal of the New Testament in the original than that those books are a Hellenized presentation of ideas essentially Hebrew in their immediate origins, however much indebted to older forms of Ageless Wisdom the Hebrew thought itself may be.

On the other hand, it should also be understood that many currents of doctrine flow together to make the mighty stream of wisdom presented in the New Testament. The ideas are predominantly, but by no means exclusively, Semitic. What we mean to suggest is that the New Testament is

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of a number would suggest a word.

“And so it was at the commencement of our era, before the introduction of the Arabic numerals. And with the Greeks, this association of letter and number was of the most intimate nature. The coining of words for the representations of preferences in number commenced very early and much of the tradition is associated with the Pythagorean schools, in which the numbers are often recognizable as conventional symbols of ratio. Terms used in music, and in astronomy and chronometry betray a like influence, and those names of divinities which are symbols of planetary times and seasons can often be identified by their ‘Gematria’ of number . . . More than all else, the notion of number-symbolism enters into, and colours, religious nomenclature. And we have abundant proof from the Fathers of the church that the earliest symbolism of God the Father was of a geometrical nature.”

Alchemy employs the same system, and the main reason there are so few books on alchemy written in Hebrew is that the great texts are in the Bible itself. Nor are they those of the Old Testament only. The Hermetic doctrine permeates the sacred literature of Christianity just as

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all of a piece with the Old, but this is far from saying that the Bible is not full of doctrine which is more ancient than what appears from the surface, literal reading of the text. Egypt and Chaldea and Persia and India, perhaps China also, have had their share in making this library of Ageless Wisdom. Once we know how to penetrate behind the outer veil of words and symbols, we find ourselves in the presence of the same mysteries which are the subject-matter of all sacred books.

Thus it is that the anonymous authors of the Rosicrucian manifestoes, after plainly intimating that their doctrine is a mixture of Hermeticism and Qabalah, assert that it is also definitely Christian, and that the Bible agrees with it on all points. From this, and from certain writings of the later alchemists, it was inferred by the ingenious author of *Remarks upon Alchemy and the Alchemists*, General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, that the real object of the Great Work was no more than moral perfection, and that the complicated symbolism of the true sages was adopted to avoid religious persecution. Those who see alchemy in this light are of the opinion that the Hermetic Art is merely a system of spiritual discipline, leading to illumination and regeneration.

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Others, like Mrs. Atwood, whose *Suggestive Inquiry* is eminently worth reading, advance the view that the Great Work is a psychological process akin to mesmerism, in which the subject of the work is a sensitive, who is trained by the operator so as to become clairvoyant.

Neither of these notions is correct, but neither is wholly false. Moral discipline is certainly part of the self-training of every alchemist, and that training includes also the application of laws and forces which were made known to the world by the discoveries of Mesmer, Braid, and their successors. The Great Work, however, is more than self-discipline, more than the exaltation of human consciousness into a state of mystic vision, and very much more than the manipulation of "ectoplasm" which one American framer of alchemical theories offered not long since as the "true" meaning of the alchemical books.

The Great Work is a physical work. It does actually operate on physical substances contained in the bowels of the earth. Here hafit has made us speak in approved Hermetic fashion, yet, though there is more in what has just been said than will be discerned by some readers, we hasten to add that the substances an al-

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chemist works with are actually found in their natural state as forms of the physical matter which constitutes the structure of this planet.

The laboratory of an alchemist, however, is a *hidden* laboratory. In the books of genuine adepts, the vessels of the art are invariably called "secret." So are the processes. Thus Bernard of Trevisan writes: "Dissolution is the whole mystery of the art, and is to be accomplished, not as some have thought, by means of fire, *but in a wholly abstruse manner*, by the help of Mercury." In this quotation, the adjective "absrruse" has the now obsolete meaning: "concealed, hidden."

Thomas Charnock gives a hint to the same effect in his *Breviary*: "I think few potters in this realm have at any time made such cunning ware, as for our science we fashion and prepare." Few, indeed, for all that alchemical books abound in pictures of alembics, retorts, and all manner of strange-looking vessels; because in truth, until the Stone is made, the only laboratory is the alchemist's own body, and the secret vessels are organs of that body. Alchemy is primarily an *interior* operation.

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Yet by no means is it wholly metaphysical. Actual physical materials are worked upon, and the operation has for its object the making of a mineral product, which may truly be called a stone. This Stone is a product of art, though the materials composing it are drawn from nature. The Great Work may be described correctly as being a psycho-physiological transformation, called *Hermetic*. Because it is directed by human self-consciousness.

As all readers of these pages have learned in the course of their Tarot studies, self-consciousness was personified by the Egyptians as Thoth, by the Greeks as Hermes, and by the Romans as Mercury. Thus it becomes evident that what Bernard of Trevيسان means by saying the work is performed by the help of Mercury is practically what the Hindu sage we quoted in Lesson 1 had in mind when he said: "It should be grasped by the mind alone."

Dissolution is said to be the whole mystery of alchemy because the Great Work enables us to control those functions of our bodies which dissolve, or break down into their constituent elements, the forms of materials taken from our environment. The secret vessels of the alchemist are organs of his own

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body, together with their etheric and astral counterparts.

The Great Work, then, is really a chemical operation, performed under the direction of man's self-conscious intelligence. It begins in man's mind, but it is realized by means of changes effected in his physical body. In consequence of these changes, he becomes a new creature, able to exercise powers which are unknown to the average human being.

When an alchemist, working in his secret laboratory, has dissolved the old creature and coagulated the new creature in its place, his physical organism enables him to effect, by means purely mental, transformations in the molecular and atomic structure of the physical substances constituting his environment. Because of the change in himself, and the power it places at his disposal, he really can manufacture a physical substance which has remarkable healing properties, and which may be employed for the transmutation of the baser metals into actual gold and silver.

His ability to do this, however, is never abused. Nor does he go about the world calling attention to his seemingly miraculous powers. To say that a perfected alchemical

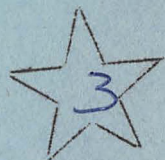
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adept can, and sometimes does, transmute base metals into gold, is simply to state a fact. To suppose that such metallic transmutation is the main object of the Great Work is to be grossly mistaken. The Work has a far higher aim.

2. 1970-1971

The 1970-1971 season was a very dry one. It was the first year since 1945 that the amount of rainfall was less than the long-term average. The total rainfall for the season was 14.5 inches, compared to the long-term average of 20.5 inches. The lack of rain caused the crops to suffer, and the water level in the reservoirs to drop. The government declared a state of emergency, and asked the people to conserve water. The situation was very serious, and the people had to make do with very little water.

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LESSON THREE

THE PRINCIPAL piece of alchemical apparatus is a furnace, called an *athanor*. Eliphas Levi says: "We are all in possession of the chemical instrument, the great and sole *athanor* which answers for the separation of the subtle from the gross and the fixed from the volatile. This instrument, complete as the world and precise as mathematics, is represented by the sages under the emblem of the pentagram, or five-pointed star, which is the absolute sign of human intelligence. I will follow the example of the wise by forbearing to name it; it is too easy to guess it."

There is no need today for even the slight concealment Levi thought advisable. The *athanor* is the human organism. Like many other alchemical terms, its name is of Chaldean origin, and comes to us through the Hebrew. It is *אֶתְחַנּוּר*, *Eth Ha-Nour*, "Essence of Fire."

Thus Bernard of Trevisan speaks truly when he says the Great Work is not performed by means of fire, and so do other sages tell the truth when they insist that the fire employed by them is no "common fire."

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It is the *essence of fire*, manifested as the human body and its finer counterparts, and thus the athanor is defined as "a self-feeding, digesting furnace, in which an equable heat is maintained."

This definition is a perfect description of the body, which feeds itself, digests what it feeds upon, and maintains within itself an even temperature. The reference to feeding and digestion is particularly significant. For the actual basis of the Great Work is directly connected with the processes whereby the physical body is built from food.

Notice that Eliphas Levi give a plain hint that the athanor is the human body when he says it is "complete as the world," that is, as the "little world," or microcosm. Then he says it is "precise as mathematics," to intimate that the Great Work is a course of training in conscious compliance with laws having their basis in mathematics. Finally, he tells us the athanor is symbolized by the pentagram.

Some reference to this important figure has been made in our other publications, but here we may begin by pointing out that every five-pointed star is a development of the pentagon, or regular polygon having five equal sides. A pentagon is the

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central figure in every pentagram. Its five equal sides symbolize the balance and equal proportion of five aspects of reality, represented by the five sides.

These five aspects of reality are the five phases of manifestation known in alchemy as the quintessence and the four elements. The fifth essence, or quintessence, corresponds to the ether of space. The four elements are fire, water, air and earth. In the figure of the pentagram, the upper point corresponds to the quintessence, the right lower point is attributed to fire, the right upper point to water, the left upper point to air, and the left lower point to earth.

Each of the five lines of a pentagram is divided in exact extreme and mean proportion. This may be defined as the division of any quantity into two such parts or proportions that the measure of the lesser part bears to the measure of the greater part the same relation that the measure of the greater part bears to the whole quantity. The occult meaning of this proportion is expressed in the Hermetic axiom: "Nature is to man as man is to God." This axiom is the philosophical basis of the Great Work. It defines man as the *greater part* (greater in power,

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though less in mass); nature as the *lesser part*, because nature is subordinate to man; God as the *ALL*, or *whole*, superior to man as man is superior to nature, and bringing nature to full perfection through human agency.

It is perfectly true that the alchemist seeks to transmute the baser metals into gold. When he speaks of the seven metals, however, he means something other than the common products of the mine. Thus George Ripley warns his readers, in his *Compound of Alchymie*, not to waste time in fruitless experiments with "mean metals digged out of the mine."

Other sages make use of the same distinction, speaking always of *our* Mercury, *our* Sulphur, *our* Gold and Silver, to show they are alluding to something peculiar to the alchemical operation. The alchemical metals bear the names of the sun, the moon, and the five planets known to the old astronomers, and in the older books are almost always designated by these names.

This is one reason Paracelsus insists that one must be acquainted with the ideas of the old astronomers in order to succeed in the Great Work. The astronomical names of the metals are used also in her-

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aldry, as has been shown in our booklet, *The Great Seal of the United States*, The heraldic colors are often used by alchemists, hence it is important to know them. The correspondences are:

LEAD.....	SATURN....	BLACK
IRON.....	MARS.....	RED
TIN.....	JUPITER...	BLUE
GOLD.....	SUN.....	YELLOW
COPPER.....	VENUS.....	GREEN
SILVER.....	MOON.....	WHITE
QUICKSILVER...	MERCURY...	ORANGE

The colors are those which, in what is called the "Queen Scale," are attributed to the spheres of the planets on the Tree of Life. In *TAROT FUNDAMENTALS* and *TAROT INTERPRETATION*, you have learned the correspondences of these to the seven interior stars, which are the same as the seven chakras of the yogis.

You will remember that Saturn corresponds to a nerve-center at the base of the spine, the sacral plexus. Mars is represented in the physical body by the prostatic ganglion. The sun governs the cardiac plexus. Venus is attributed to the pharyngeal plexus. The moon corresponds to the cavernous ganglion, which lies on either side of the *sella turcica*, the protective covering of the pituitary body. Mercury

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is represented by the pineal gland.

In that portion of the Great Work which has to do with the transformation of the alchemist himself, the making of the Philosophers' Stone is a process whereby the vibratory activity of these interior stars is so modified that the lower rates of vibration are transmuted (literally, "changed across") and sublimated, or lifted up. This transmutation of the subtle force which works through the interior stars has a triple consequence. It leads to spiritual illumination. It gives the perfected adept a new body which is absolutely healthy. It enables him to exercise powers which remain latent in most human beings.

His health is the result of perfect combination and co-ordination of chemical and electrical energies which maintain the form and functions of his physical body. This condition of radiant vitality is communicable. When it is established, an alchemist can project his own rate of vibration upon the bodies of other persons, inducing a vibration like that of his own organs. This is one method of Hermetic healing.

His mental and spiritual vibration is also communicable. By projecting his own state of con-

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sciousness on the mind of another, he can raise the level of that person's consciousness, so that it approximates his own. Of such spiritual contagion, the Bible, and the sacred writings of other religions, afford many notable examples.

When this is done, an actual force is projected. This is the alchemical "powder of projection," by means of which "base metals," deluded, ignorant men and women, may be transmuted into "gold," enlightened, liberated personalities.

George Ripley warns against misuse of this powder. He says the metals on which projection is made must first be properly cleansed.

What he means is obvious when we understand the figurative language. The work of projection refers to the transmutation of the minds and bodies of an adept's disciples. By it an unwritten and unspoken something passes from the mind of him who knows to the minds of those he instructs. The pupil is the metal to be transmuted, and the metal must be cleansed. That is, the mind of the pupil, and his body also, must be purified before the higher secrets of the art are communicated. These are never committed to writing, nor can they be told by means of ordinary speech. The knowledge is beyond the

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limits of exoteric verbal expression.

Alchemy aims at a state of consciousness which is reflected into the physical plane as perfect vibratory equilibrium. This equilibrium already exists in nature, and it is the business of an alchemist to manifest it through his personality. Thus we are told that equilibrium is the basis of the Great Work, and all Hermetic books admonish us to imitate nature.

The perfectly balanced state of personality is the "new mind" of the injunction: "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." It is a new understanding of life, founded on a new type of experience.

A prominent characteristic of this experience is that it is permeated with the quality of eternity, hinted at in the Rosicrucian inquiry: "Were it not an excellent thing to live always so as if you had lived from the beginning of the world, and should still live to the end thereof?" Such a state of consciousness is attainable, and that long before perfect adeptship is reached. One of the earliest fruits of the practice of the Great Work is an inner certainty of immortality, which ripens later into definite knowledge, beyond the power of words to express or communicate.

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Yet alchemy is not exclusively concerned with consciousness. What is aimed at in the performance of the Great Work is more than a state of mind, more than a philosophical or metaphysical realization. In saying the Great Work unfolds a new kind of consciousness, we mean you to understand that he in whom this unfoldment occurs is thereby enabled to exercise all the powers that go with it.

He does actually find himself able to command the "spirits of the elements," the subtle forces whose interplay produces the various appearances of the physical world. This command enables him to transform his corruptible physical body into a body incorruptible. By the same mastery, he controls conditions. He can alter the appearance of things round him, and even change their atomic structure, by raising or lowering their rates of vibration. It is by such control that he performs the secondary operation which enables him to make an actual physical substance which may be employed, even by persons who are not themselves adepts, to transmute metals and heal diseases.

Nevertheless, man himself is the primary subject of the Great Art, It is useless to try to make the

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Philosophers' Stone *outside* oneself before one has completed the first part of the operation, which makes the operator himself the Living Stone.

Thus it sometimes happens that diligent, intuitive students learn from the books what materials are employed for the secondary operation, and what physical process is followed in making the *external* Stone. Yet something always goes wrong with their attempts. This is inevitable. There is wanting to the perfection of their work the power we have just described. One must be the Stone before one may *make* it.

No secret formula can enable us to control the subtle forces of nature unless we begin by controlling them within ourselves. Our minds must be changed, so that we may perceive and understand things hidden from the uninitiated. Our bodies must be transmuted, because they constitute the Vase of Art, in which the whole operation is performed. In their natural state they cannot receive and specialize the high-tension currents of the essence of fire, which would destroy the physical organism of an average person.

Alchemy, then, is the Western version of what Hindus call yoga. This is indicated by various points of

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identity between the two systems of philosophy and practice.

Obviously, the alchemical metals are the same as the *chakras* of the yogis. We have noticed also the remarkable similarity of ideas and language in *The Emerald Tablet* and in a passage from the *Katha Upanishad*. These are by no means the only close resemblances.

Fundamental in alchemy is the doctrine that all things whatsoever are manifestations of three principles: Sulphur, Mercury and Salt. They are not the common physical substances. Their names indicate three ways in which the One Thing manifests itself. One is identified by a quality like a quality possessed by Sulphur. Another has characteristics like those of Quicksilver. The third has properties resembling those of Salt.

Sulphur, or brimstone, burns easily, and has choking fumes. For centuries it has been associated with the fires of hell, and with the seething passions those fires typify. Mercury is liquid and flowing, and the surface of each globule of this metal is a mirror reflecting its environment. Its rapid movement, like that of a living creature, accounts for the name Quicksilver, in which "quick" means both living and rapid, as we may see from the French

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argent vive, "living silver." Salt crystallizes in perfect cubes, and, since the days of Pythagoras, cubes have been types of earth and the physical plane. Salt has also the property of arresting dissolution, or disintegrative chemical change. The quality of Sulphur, then, is fiery and passionate. That of Mercury is vital and reflective. That of Salt is arrestive and binding.

Compare these alchemical doctrines with the yoga teaching. The yogis affirm the existence of three *gunas*, or qualities, entering into the composition of all things. Wherever there is a form, there are the three qualities. Their names are *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

In the fourteenth chapter of *The Bhagavad-Gita* their characteristics are fully described. There we read that *Rajas* is the embodiment of desire, and the producer of thirst and relish; that it ties the ego through attachment to action; that from it are born greed, initiation of action, energy in great worldly achievements, unrest and thirst. The same chapter says the quality of *Sattva* is illuminative; that it is transparent, or light-transmitting; that it ties the ego through attachment to happiness and knowledge;

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that when it is dominant there is the illumination of knowledge at every gate of the body, and thus the senses and faculties attain the fullest manifestation of power. As to the quality of *Tamas*, we are told that it is born of insensibility; that it ties up the ego by means of heedlessness, laziness and sleep; that it veils the power of discrimination, and is the cause of spiritual blindness. We may represent these three qualities by three English words: Desire (*Rajas*); Intelligence (*Sattva*); Inertia (*Tamas*). The same three words might be used in place of the names of the alchemical principles, Sulphur, Mercury and Salt.

Again, alchemists recognize five phases of manifestation, or five classes of expression for the One Thing. The first of these is the quintessence, or fifth essence, so named because it is a fifth thing, extracted by the alchemical operation from the four elements. Yet alchemists agree that the quintessence is also the root or source of the four elements: fire, water, air and earth.

Their teaching is the same as that of the yogis, who call the five classes of expression *Tattvas*. The *Tattvas* are: *Akasha* (quintessence);

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Tejas or *Agni* (fire); *Apas* (water); *Vayu* (air); *Prithivi* (earth). Furthermore, yoga philosophy states that the five *Tattvas* are subtle principles of sensation; that every *Tattva* has its own peculiar property; and that there is a cyclic ebb and flow of the *Tattvas*, in regular sequence, through all things and creatures.

Yoga practice aims to control this cyclic flow of the *Tattvas*. Similarly, in alchemy we hear of a wheel of the elements, with the quintessence at the center. This is illustrated by Key 10 of Tarot. Concerning the work this Key symbolizes, Ripley, in his *Compound of Alchymie*, writes:

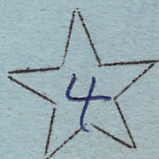
But first of these elements make
thou rotation,
And into Water thy Earth turn
first of all;
Then of thy Water make Air by
levigation;
And Air make Fire; then MASTER
will I thee call
Of all our secrets, great and
small;
The Wheel of the Elements thou
canst turn about,
Truly conceiving our writings
without doubt.

Levigation is a term used in alchemy to indicate various processes for making a substance smooth, free

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from grit, or impalpable, like a very fine powder. Here, Ripley intends it to represent the work which transforms alchemical "water" into alchemical "air," so that it becomes invisible and intangible.

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LESSON FOUR

PREPARATION FOR the practice of alchemy is, in all essentials, the same as preparation for the practice of yoga. It is, first of all, a moral or ethical preparation. Evil tendencies are to be overcome, and positive virtues developed. The gross functions of the body are to be purified. Then comes the finer purification of interior centers. The object of these yoga practices is precisely what is mentioned by Basil Valentine in *The Triumphal Chariot of Antimony*, when he instructs his readers how to prepare for the Great Work.

“Invocation of God,” says he, “with a certain heavenly intention, drawn from the depths of sincere heart and conscience, liberated from ambition, hypocrisy and all other vices which are in affinity with these, including arrogance, luxury, boldness, petulancy, oppression of the poor, and similar evils. All of these are to be eradicated from the heart, that when a man desires to prostrate himself before the Throne of Grace, in order to obtain health, he may do so with a conscience free from unprofitable weeds, so that his

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body may be transmuted into a holy temple of God and purged from all uncleanness."

This is exactly what we find in descriptions of the preliminary practices of yoga. Observe that the objective is not wealth, but health. That is, wholeness or completeness.

Basil Valentine is supposed to have been a monk of the Benedictine Order, and he may well have understood that health in the sense of completeness is the exact meaning of the Hebrew noun *Shalom*, which has special mystical significance in Qabalah. At any rate, he is perfectly clear as to what it is that is to be transmuted, and his choice of this peculiarly alchemical verb cannot be lightly passed over. If words have any meaning whatever, Basil Valentine tells us here that the object of the Great Work is the transmutation of the alchemist's body, and the initial step to this end a "certain heavenly intention," that is, a reaching inward to heaven.

Any yogi would understand what he means his readers to gather from these words. Furthermore, yoga practice aims to do another thing which alchemists endeavor to accomplish. The fire of alchemy is said to be a secret fire, which is often

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compared to a serpent or a dragon. In yoga practice, likewise, the active principle of the operation is said to be a fiery force, coiled in the Saturn center at the base of the spine. It is named *Kundalini*, the coiled serpent-power.

Yoga practice raises this serpent power, stage by stage, through the seven *chakras* we have identified with the metals. The practice is therefore really a practice of sublimation, which lifts up and brings into active manifestation the hidden powers of the subconscious life of man. Yoga calls forth the powers of the "underworld," whose ruler, the Egyptians believed, was Osiris. Alchemy does the same.

Furthermore, Paracelsus, like the rest of the sages, declares that the Great Work is performed by the aid of Mercury, and that the only other agencies of the art are the powers of the sun and moon. In like manner the yoga system recognizes the primary importance of the power personified by the god Mercury, for, as the *Upanishad* tells us, the object of yoga is something which is to be grasped by the mind alone. Yogis recognize also two other agencies. One, hot and fiery, they call *Prana* or *Surya*, *Surya* meaning "sun." The other agency, cold and moist, is

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named *Rayi*, and is always termed the *lunar* current.

The points of correspondence between yoga and alchemy are therefore these:

1. Both systems agree that all things are expressions of one fundamental energy.

2. Both affirm that all things combine three qualities: a. Wisdom, *Sattva*, or Mercury; b. Desire, *Rajas*, or Sulphur; c. Inertia, *Tamas*, or Salt.

3. Both recognize five modes of expression; *Akasha*, Spirit, or the quintessence; *Tejas* or Agni, fire; *Apas*, water; *Vayu*, air; *Prithivi*, earth.

4. Both systems mention seven principal vehicles of activity, called *chakras* by yogis, and *metals* by alchemists.

5. Both say there is a secret force, fiery in quality, which is to be raised from one *chakra* or metal to another, until the power of all seven is sublimated in the highest.

6. Yoga says *Prana* or *Surya*, sun, *Rayi*, moon, and *Sattva*, wisdom, are the three main agencies in the work. Alchemy says the whole operation is a work of the sun and moon, aided by Mercury.

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7. In both systems, preparation for the work is the establishment of physical purity and ethical freedom from lust, avarice, and other anti-social tendencies.

8. According to both systems, success enables adepts to exercise extraordinary powers, to heal all diseases, and to control all the forces of nature, so as to exert a determining influence on circumstance.

The basis of alchemy, like the basis of yoga, is the idea that man is a direct consequence of the perfectly free, unmodified Spirit whence all things proceed. This is the true essence of his being. The Great Work is the direction of energy derived from that essence, according to the perceptions of an awakened intelligence.

The intelligence which aids this work is the self-consciousness of man, which, though not the highest level of life-expression, has this power: *it can perceive the true order of nature, by discerning the principles behind the veil of surface appearances.*

In its ability to discover principles, and in its power to control by suggestion the forces of the sub-conscious life, self-consciousness

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combines the two greatest potencies known to us. By the recognition of the principles on which the human body and the things in its environment are constructed, the intelligence of man is able to invent and carry into execution novel applications of these principles, not provided by nature apart from the intervention of human self-consciousness. Thus man is able to bring about a finer adjustment, and a better organization, not only of his environment, but also of his own personal organism.

The result of so doing is the production of a new kind of human being, capable of receiving the influx of forms of energy which would disintegrate an ordinary human body, and able to express modes of consciousness quite unknown to the greater number of men and women.

The alchemist himself is the subject of the primary operation of the Great Work. His laboratory is his own personality. The secret vessels of that laboratory are organs of his own body. His practice enables him to demonstrate that his personality is a field for the operation of the Sun. Step by step, it gently and gradually alters his mind and body until he reaches the stage of illumination wherein he perceives

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directly the truth that he is living the eternal life of the One Power which brings all things into manifestation, and sustains and governs everything in the universe.

At the completion of the Great Work, the alchemist has so transmuted his personality that he expresses nothing but the inwardly perceived impulses of the One Power. Whatever he thinks, says or does, he *knows* to be a direct expression of the One Will.

He does not *believe* this. He *knows* it; and he knows it whether his contemporaries understand him or not. As a rule, he is very discreet, and is careful to make no profession of adeptship, often concealing his true status from even his closest friends and relatives.

For adeptship is a way of being, and a way of living, incomprehensible to persons who are not themselves adepts. An adept knows the true significance of even the tiniest details of his daily life, and in all things acts as an administrator of the eternal laws of Being, for the furtherance of the Great Plan.

To this high goal direct your aspiration. It may seem far beyond you now. Yet the Wisdom of the Ages proclaims that whosoever will per-

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sist in the Great Work, carrying it out stage by stage, will certainly complete it.

“This completion is the ‘Confection of the Philosophers’ Stone.’” The verb ‘confect’ means to compose from various ingredients, and thus the confection of the Stone means for alchemists the composition of something by art.

“Bellows alchemists,” charlatans, and those deluded by the cryptic writings of true sages into the false belief that the Work is a physical operation, performed in an external laboratory, suppose the Stone to be a physical object.

What true alchemists have in mind is to be gathered from the writings of one of the best among them, Jacob Boehme. For Boehme was not, as many have erroneously supposed, merely a mystic, yielding to the spirit of his age in his use of alchemical terms. He was a real alchemist, as truly a member of the great company of sages as any other whom we shall quote in these pages. Thus what he has to say about the Philosophers’ Stone deserves our most careful consideration. The following quotations are taken from his *Threefold Life of Man*..

“The old Adamical flesh of death cometh not to the heavenly flesh: No,

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it belongeth to the earth, to death; but the eternal flesh is *hidden* in the old earthly man, and it is in the old man, as the fire in iron, or as the gold in the dark stone. This is the noble stone, (*Lapis Philosophorum*), the Philosophers' Stone, which the Magi find, which tinctureth nature, and generateth a new son in the old. He who findeth *that*, esteemeth more highly of it than of this outward world . . .

"He who hath it, and knoweth it, if he seeketh, he may find all things whatsoever are in heaven and in earth. It is the *Stone which is rejected of the builders*, and is the chief corner stone; upon whatsoever it falleth, it grindeth to powder, and kindleth a fire therein. All universities seek it, but find it not by their seeking; sometimes it is found by one that seeketh it rightly. But others (that seek it in self, and for their own gain) despise it, and cast it away, and so it remaineth *hidden still*."

Here it may be noted that in Hebrew, "the stone which the builders refused" is אבן סאסו הבונים, *ehben masu ha-bonaim*, and that by the numerical correspondences of words, this phrase is equivalent to נורא, *aur genoz*, the Hidden Light, and to אביו חורם, *Khurum Abiv*, or

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Hiram Abiff, the name of the central figure in the legend of Freemasonry.

Jacob Boehme says further: "In this Stone there lieth hidden, whatsoever God and the eternity, also heaven, the stars, and elements contain, and are able to do: There never was from eternity anything better or more precious than this, and it is offered by God, and bestowed upon man; every one may have it that doth desire it; it is in a simple form, and hath the power of the whole Deity in it."

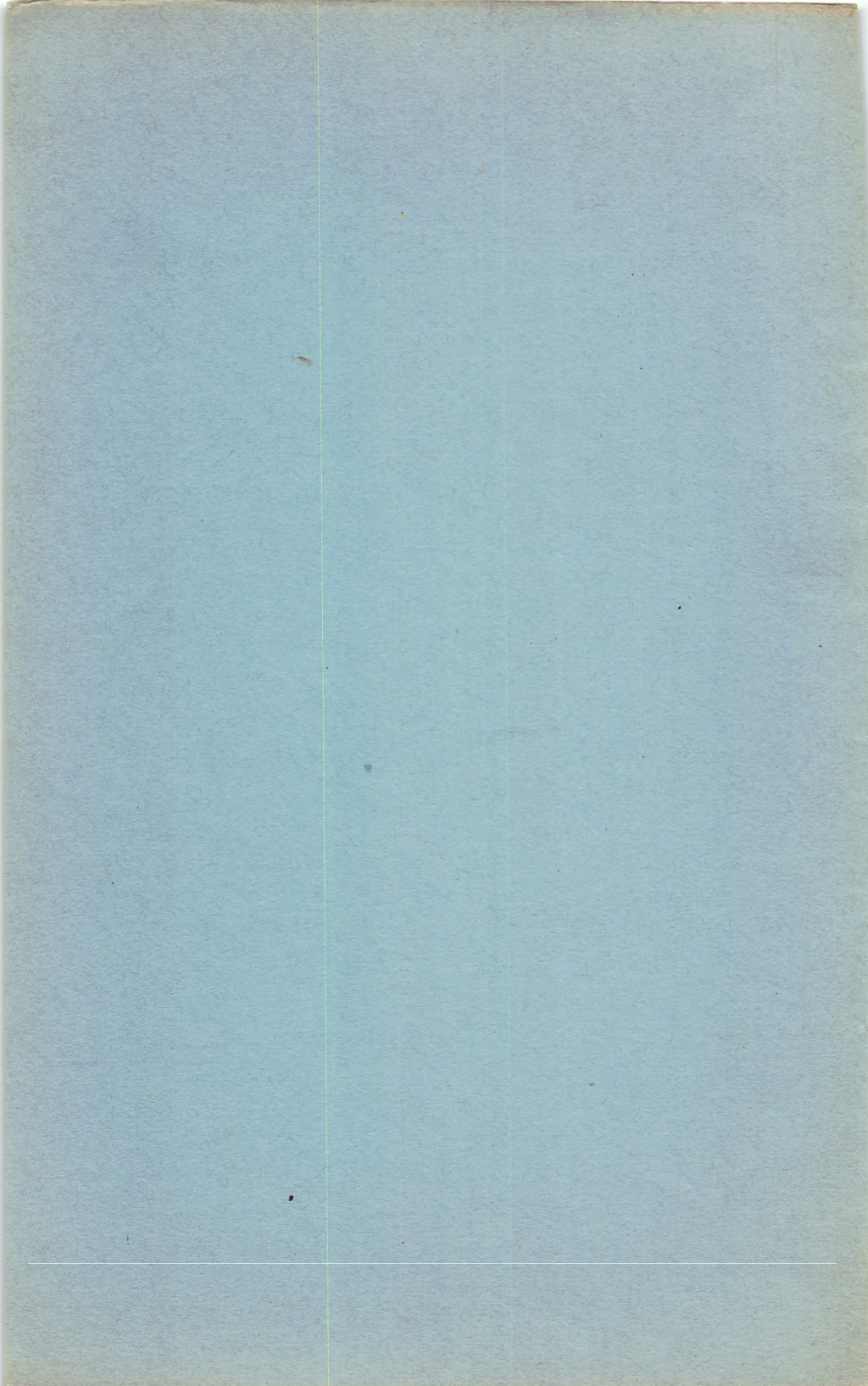
In various places in our lessons on Tarot, in *The Tree of Life*, and in *The Master Pattern*, you have found references to this same Stone, under its usual Qabalistic title, \aleph , *Ehben*. There you have been told that the Stone represents the union of the central Ego in man, Qabalistically termed \beth , *Ben*, the Son, with the cosmic Life-power seated in the second Sephirah, which power is designated α , *Ab*, the Father.

Boehme speaks of "finding" this Stone, but he also, like all true alchemists, teaches his readers that the "finding" is also a "making," or a "confection." In one sense, to be sure, the true Stone already exists within each of us, but only

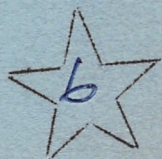
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in its elements. These must be discovered, and then brought into the perfect union suggested by the presence of the two words, אב, *Ab*, and בן, *Ben*, in אבן, *Ehben*, Stone.

The initial stage of the work is known to alchemists as "the discovery of the First Matter," and to this discovery the next eight lessons of this series will be devoted.



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LESSON SIX

THE FIRST MATTER (2)

The author of *The Glory of the World* writes:

“I make known to all ingenuous students of this Art that the sages are in the habit of using words which may convey either a true or a false impression; the former to their own disciples and children, the latter to the ignorant, the foolish, and the unworthy. Bear in mind that the philosophers themselves never make a false assertion. The mistake (if any) lies not with them, but with those whose dulness makes them slow to apprehend the meaning. Hence it comes that, instead of the waters of the Sages, these inexperienced persons take pyrites, salts, metals, and diverse other substances which, though very expensive, are of no use whatever for our purpose. For no one would dream of buying the true Matter at the apothecary's; nay, that tradesman daily casts it into the street as worthless refuse.”

Just now there is special need that the Great Work be performed by all who are qualified to undertake

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it. We are in the midst of a crisis in human affairs, such as the race has not faced in milleniums. Every available means is being employed to increase the number of persons having insight sufficient to deal with the problems besetting us, and power adequate for the work which must be done to solve these problems. Thus Those Who Know are making it easier for earnest inquirers to learn the secret.

It is just as impossible as ever to *tell* the secret. Every seeker must make the discovery for himself. What can, and will, be done is to help inquirers to draw the inferences which will prepare them to make the discovery. Be on your guard! As you proceed with this lesson, you may come to a point where you will say: "Why, of course! The First Matter is----" whatever you may decide.

You may conclude that it is the ether of space. You may suppose it to be the same as *Akasha*. We do not say that either of these conclusions is wrong. We simply warn you that no such inference is to be mistaken for the *discovery* of the First Matter.

Suppose you were at the entrance to an unlighted room, perishing of

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hunger. Suppose you found on the door a cryptic description of the contents of the room, from which you drew the correct inference that all manner of good things to eat were on a table inside. Could you eat the inference?

So it is with the First Matter. By using reason, you may be able to determine what it must be. We shall do what we can to aid your efforts to come to a correct inference as to what the First Matter is. Yet the discovery is more than a reasoned conclusion. It is direct perception, and goes beyond reason.

Remembering what Paracelsus said concerning "the use of the Qabalists," we shall employ Qabalah freely in our endeavor to elucidate the meaning of writings of the adepts. If you are unfamiliar with Qabalistic methods, they will probably seem far from any mode of thinking to which you are accustomed. As you progress, practice will make this kind of thinking easier.

At first, however, it may be well to concentrate more particularly on the conclusions than on the manner in which they are reached. As you proceed, you will begin to understand the Qabalistic method; but at first you will do well to devote most of your time to pondering its results.

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COMMENT ON THE WORDS OF THE SAGES.

All sages are agreed that the First Matter is one, and, as Anastratus says, contains within itself all that is needed. Availing ourselves here of the Qabalah, we find that the Hebrew word for "one" is **אחד**, *achad* or *echud*, and that because the sum of the values of its letters is 13, it corresponds to **בְּהוּ**, *bohu*, "emptiness, chaos." This is applied, in Genesis 1:2, to the first state of the earth, where the Authorized Version translates *bohu* as "void." Here we find a point of agreement with others who call the First Matter a "chaos."

Yet this is not all. The number 13 is the value also of **הִגֵּה**, *hegeh*, meaning "sound, muttering, thought or musing." What is intimated is that the primary chaos is the stuff thoughts are made of, and that it is, moreover, a mode of vibration closely related to sound.

Anastratus goes on to say: "Its birth is in the sand." The Hebrew for "sand" is **חֹל**, *khool*, and the root of the noun is a verb, spelled with the same letters, meaning, "to turn round, to twist, to whirl." In all probability, the connection is from ancient observation of des-

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ert whirlwinds, tossing the sand into spiral shapes, seeming to be alive, to which may be traced the tales about genii.

This word *khool*, moreover, has a meaning definitely related to the First Matter, for often alchemists call this their Phoenix, and, according to Gesenius, the word קוּל, in Job 29:18, was understood by the Jewish Rabbins as being a reference to this mythical bird.

The origin of the First Matter is actually a spiral, twisting motion like that made visible by sand in a desert storm. It is also a motion directly connected with sound and with thought. Thought-force is a real force, and thought-substance a real substance. He who would perform the Great Work must needs learn that thoughts are really things.

Again, קוּל is composed of Hebrew letters whose values are 8, 6 and 30, so that the word is the number 44, which is the value of the noun דָּם, *dam*, "blood." This takes us a step nearer to what we are seeking, for it is from blood that we derive the substance we use in the Great Work. That substance is something which actually moves in spirals through our bodies. It is said to be "the distilled moisture of the

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moon, joined to the light of the sun," because it is identical with the lunar and solar currents of *Prana* described by yogis. And Anastratus agrees with other adepts when he says this union of solar light and lunar moisture is "congealed," or brought into a solid state by a process involving a gradual loss of heat.

Man's conceptions of reality are largely derived from sensations of mass, weight and solidity. Actually a solid is frozen mind-stuff. Solidity is an illusion. We think of gold as being solid because we are accustomed to seeing this metal at a temperature below that at which it crystallizes. We think of mercury as a liquid because our ordinary experiences of this metal are sensations of its appearance at a temperature above its point of crystallization. By thought-controlled use of energy within us, it is possible to congeal mind-stuff into physical forms, and the substance on which this operation is performed is the First Matter.

Thus Rosinus tells us that the object of our desire is the one thing out of which all things are made. This one thing is transformed from invisibility into visibility by what we call weight, or gravitation. The

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dictionaries say gravitation is an unknown force, but the makers of dictionaries are not alchemists. The sages know what lexicographers have yet to discover. They know gravitation is a *mental* power, working at the level of awareness which psychology calls self-consciousness.

In self-consciousness resides the power which determines weight and proportion. It does not matter that few human beings are aware of this fact. Ignorance of a fact does not erase it. It simply prevents us from using the fact. What alchemists mean us to understand when they say the Great Work is performed by the aid of Mercury is that one of the powers of human self-consciousness is this ability to direct the "unknown force" of gravitation. For Mercury was the Roman god corresponding to the Greek Hermes and the Egyptian Thoth, personifying the form-determining power of self-consciousness. This is why Mercury is represented in Tarot by the Magician. Magic is the art of using the power of self-consciousness to congeal invisible, formless substance into tangible, physical forms.

That this power dwells in human beings as a potentiality of self-consciousness we learn from the yogis. Yoga enables one to direct

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and adapt modes of light-vibration from the self-conscious level. This is evident when we remember that all yoga practice begins with acts of conscious attention.

One of the powers of a yogi is that of levitation. He can make his own body levitate, and he can alter the weight of objects outside his body. That is, he controls gravitation. So does an adept in alchemy, and by such control the Great Work is accomplished. Without it, moreover, it is impossible to make the physical agent of transmutation we mentioned in the first of these lessons.

Passing now to our second quotation from the *Turba*, we must be on our guard. It says: "In this world it is discerned by reason without the clients thereof," which are the senses. Here is a good example of alchemical subtlety. "This world" is the world of man's sensations. Thus it is quite true that in "this world" the First Matter is perceived by reason alone. Yet this rational perception is only a prelude to the actual discovery of the First Matter. Thus it is evident that the discovery is not made in "this world." Nor is it made by

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the exercise of physical sensation. The point is that there are other worlds than this, to which man has access through the unfoldment of a higher kind of perception to which right reasoning is but the introduction. Reasoning prepares the mind for this higher knowledge.

The quotation from the *Turba* given in Lesson 5, page 8, is more explicit than any of the others. It says the tincture is made from "our copper;" and the next quotation, from Thomas Vaughan, indicates the same thing when it calls the First Matter "a certain soft, prolific Venus."

As an alchemical metal, copper is the same as the Venus center, and this is the yoga lotus, or *chakra*, situated at the well of the throat.

It is the center of what Hinduism calls *Kama Manas*, the desire nature. To change this "copper" into "white" is to raise the activity of the Venus center to the level of the Moon center behind the root of the nose. To "make visible coins" is to produce tangible physical results as a consequence of the operation.

This will be better understood by readers who have studied Tarot if they remember that the suit of coins

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or pentacles refers to the plane of concrete, manifested results. To make our "copper" into "white" is to utilize the desire force of creative imagination which Tarot symbolizes as the Empress, and raise it to the higher level of clear recollection pictured by the High Priestess.

Active desire is the raw material, but it has to be purged of the separateness which is mixed with it. We must rid our desire of the quality of personal attachment. Then we can see clearly how what we want personally may be put into right relation with other elements of the cosmic pattern. The urge of personal desire has to be transformed into the will for manifestation of certain aspects of cosmic law.

Our copper, personal desire, has to be subjected to fire, or to the influx of spiritual energy. It has to be broken up, or analyzed into its component elements. It has to be deprived of the blackness of ignorance and attachment. Then it becomes clear white, because it is transformed into recognition of some aspect of the great pattern of universal law, symbolized in Tarot by the pattern on the veil behind the High Priestess, and by the book or scroll on her lap.

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What is meant by this is that what we conceive as a personal desire is invariably the drive of some universal tendency which we are able to bring into manifestation. To do this to the best advantage, we must analyze what we desire until we see the principles it embodies. Then we must purge it of attachment and ignorance, and relate it to those principles of universal law which give it cosmic, as well as personal, significance. This is what is meant by changing "our copper" into "white," that is to say, into "our silver."

After this is done, we must again turn it into redness. Red is the color of Mars, and always refers to action. When the white of clear perception of truth is permeated with the redness of action, then the Tincture is made, and the silver is transmuted into the gold of complete realization. Hence, at the end of the quotation we read, "Then rule it." What is to be ruled is the purified desire nature. To rule it, we must act, for rulership is the control of activity.

Do not be confused. Early in this part of our explanation we spoke of the relation of "copper" to a center in the throat. This is a cluster of nerves and glands which are

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brought under control by the work we have just outlined. No attempt at direct concentration on the throat center should be made. The wise yogi and the wise alchemist leave such attempts to tyros. They understand that, in the long run, the quivkest and safest way is to set up behavior patterns of thought and action which will automatically insure the desired function of the centers involved in those patterns.

What alchemy has to say about copper goes even deeper than this. One of the ancient Semitic names for copper is נחש, *Nachash*, and this is also the name of the serpent in the Biblical allegory of Eden. The number of this word is 358, which is also the value of משיח, *Messiah* or *Messiah*, "The Anointed," corresponding to the English noun *Christ*.

What has to be transmuted, made white, and then tintured with redness, is this same serpent power. In the Hebrew alphabet it is represented by *Teth*, the serpent. In Tarot it is pictured as a red lion, tamed by a woman robed in white, as shown in Key 8.

One has only to read the allegory of the Fall to see that the serpent personifies the power of sensation to

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arouse desire. What the Inner School has always known and taught is that when this power is rightly understood and properly directed, it may be transformed into the instrumentality of liberation.

Because the truth here intimated is easily misunderstood it is always reserved. To exoteric religionists it is anathema, because they cannot understand what seems to them to be a blasphemous identification of good and evil.

They do not notice that the story of the Fall plainly declares that the disaster was a consequence of attempting to sustain life by assimilating knowledge of good *and* evil. That is to say, the error in eating the forbidden fruit is the very one these exoteric religionists perpetuate. They insist that certain forms of activity are essentially good, and that other forms are essentially bad.

Were this true, it would be necessary to be able to distinguish good forms from bad, and the sad experience of ages demonstrates the utter impossibility of this. We cannot gain our liberty by this mistaken use of our power to discriminate. To attempt it is to eat the forbidden fruit, and the inevitable penalty is death.

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The higher wisdom realized the relativity of what human ignorance supposes to be absolute. Man calls whatever he fears, whatever seems to threaten his comfortable security, whatever in his experience appears to have a disintegrating effect upon him, 'evil.' What he likes, what seems to him to make for security, what he thinks he understands and can use to promote what he conceives to be his welfare, he believes to be 'good.' All too often, it turns out that he is mistaken.

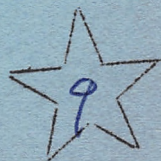
If we could live for milleniums, we never could arrive at absolute certainty, either as to objectives, or as to ways to attain them, did we have to be certain of all the good, and equally certain of all the evil. Thus it is evident there must be another way, and that way is the method of occult science.

The wise see the relativity of human standards based on superficial experience. They unite to proclaim that appearances of evil are actually indications of unrealized potencies, leading to positive good. They say the serpent power may be transformed into the instrument of liberation. They show us exactly what must be done in order to effect this transformation.

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In Lesson 7 we shall continue our comments on the words of the sages, concerning the First Matter. In so doing we shall avail ourselves of many clues from the Holy Qabalah.

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LESSON NINE

THE FIRST MATTER (5)

THE FIRST MATTER is often called Magnesia, and is so described in the glossary to Mr. Waite's translation of the Hermetic writings of Paracelsus. This description is taken, almost *verbatim*, from the writings of Thomas Vaughan.

“*Magnesia*. This term, which is occasionally used by Paracelsus in its alchemical, as distinct from its chemical sense, has received many explanations from the adepts. It is the matter of the Stone, which the philosophers sometimes call their red, and sometimes their white magnesia. In the first preparation the chaos is blood-red, because the central sulphur is stirred up and discovered by the philosophical fire. In the second it is exceedingly white and transparent like the heavens. It is something like common quicksilver, but of such a celestial and transcendent brightness, that nothing on earth can be compared to it. It is a child of the elements, a pure virgin, from whom nothing has been generated as yet. When she

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breeds, it is by the fire of Nature, which is her husband. She is neither animal, vegetable, nor mineral, nor is she an extraction from these; she is pre-existent to them all, and is their mother. She is a pure, simple substance, yielding to nothing but love, because generation is her aim, and that is never accomplished by violence. She produces from her heart a thick, heavy, snow-white water, which is the *Lac Virginis* (Virgin's Milk), and afterwards blood from her heart. Lastly she presents a secret crystal. She is one and three, but at the same time she is four and five. She is the Catholic Magnesia, the Sperm of the World, out of which all natural things are generated. Her body is in a sense incorruptible; the common elements will not destroy it, nor does she mix with them essentially. Outwardly she resembles a stone, and yet she is no stone. The philosophers call her their white gum, water of their sea, water of life, most pure and blessed water; she is a thick, permanent, saltish water, which does not wet the hand, a dry water, viscous and slimy, and generated from the saline fatness of the earth. Fire cannot destroy her, for she is herself fire, having within her a portion of the universal fire

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of Nature, and a secret, celestial spirit, animated and quickened by God. She is a middle nature, between thick and thin, not altogether earthly, not wholly igneous, but a mean aerial substance, to be found everywhere and at all seasons."

In the statement: "She is one and three, but at the same time she is four and five," find several clues to the arcana of Hermetic Science.

The First Matter is in itself a perfect unity. Hence *The Emerald Tablet* says: "All things are from one, by the mediation of one, . . . and all things have their birth from this one thing by adaptation." Another says of the First Matter, "It is a commonly diffused subject." Similarly, Anastratus says the matter is one, and contains within itself all that is needed. The same declaration, with variations of wording, is made by all sages.

The First Matter is also *three*, because it contains within itself the three principles: Sulphur, Mercury and Salt. These are not three things of which the First Matter is composed. The First Matter is not a composition. It is a perfectly homogeneous unity. Rather are the three principles to be understood as being three aspects of the nature of the One Thing, inseparable from it,

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and from one another. Sulphur, Mercury and Salt are three ways in which the First Matter manifests itself, three phases of its behavior.

The First Matter is said to be *four*, because it is expressed as the four elements: fire, water, air and earth. These, as *The Book of Tokens* says, are really subtle, invisible entities, and should not be understood to signify anything limited to the physical plane. From Yoga philosophy we learn that fire is the subtle principle of sight, water the subtle principle of taste, air the subtle principle of touch, and earth the subtle principle of smell.

Each principle has also a characteristic property. The property of fire is expansion; that of water is contraction; that of air is locomotion; and that of earth is cohesion. Every principle has also a characteristic taste quality. Fire is hot and pungent; water is cool, astringent, bitter; air is acid, sour and sharp; earth is sweet.

These last should be compared with Jacob Boehme's doctrine that in the Primary Substance there is a two-fold fire, having the qualities of bitterness and sharpness. Boehme knew nothing of Yoga philosophy as such, but he had the same kind of

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experience as that which is the basis of Yoga doctrine. He was, in fact, a European Yogi. It is significant, therefore, that in all his attempts to explain his philosophy he employed alchemical language.

The subtle principles of Yoga philosophy are sometimes called "ethers," as in Rama Prasad's book, *Nature's Finer Forces*, where we read that *Tejas* (fire) is the luminiferous ether; that *Apas* (water) is the gustiferous ether; that *Vayu* (air) is the tangiferous ether; and that *Prithivi* (earth) is the odoriferous ether.

We dislike this confusing use of the word "ether." In the esoteric teaching, there are said to be subdivisions of the ether, and these are sometimes loosely designated as the first, second, third and fourth ethers; but the term properly belongs only to the grossest manifestation of *Akasha*, and *Akasha*, as you learned from Lesson 3, is identical with the alchemical Quintessence.

The Sanskrit name for "principle" is *Tattva*, sometimes spelt *Tattwa*. Its literal meaning is "reality." This meaning carries a genuine significance. It indicates that the *Tattvas* are not merely hypothetical entities. They are not

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just human notions or names. They have actual being. They are real forces which give us our consciousness of sight, taste, touch and smell. From these, and from the fifth principle, out of which they all proceed or are derived, we formulate our whole awareness of the world surrounding us.

We perceive nothing whatever directly. All we know are various combinations of sensations. Not that what we perceive in the world round us is unreal. What we must grasp is that the reality is not the same as our sensory perceptions. Our world is a synthesis of sensations. Sensation is all that we know, and sensation gives no immediate report of the real world.

The First Matter is said to be *%ve*, because it includes another principle besides the four whose activities produce in us our ordinary experience of the physical world. In alchemical writings this principle is called the Quintessence, and is usually said to be "extracted" from the four elements in the course of the Great Work. This is said because we derive our awareness of the Quintessence from our experience of the operation of the other four. The Quintessence, however, is not in itself an extraction from the four

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other principles. It is not derived from them. They are derived from it.

The Sanskrit name for the Quintessence is *Akasha*. *Akasha* is said to have neither touch, taste, color nor odor. Its fundamental quality is that of space. Here we encounter a difficulty. There is a difference between absolute space, or *Akasha*, and relative space, such as we ordinarily conceive. Relative space, as Einstein has indicated, is curved and finite. It may not be very exact to say that *Akasha*, or absolute space, contains relative space; but this is as near as we can come to the truth of the matter, considering the limitations of human speech.

Akasha, moreover, is the subtle principle of sound. This is not ordinary sound, the atmospheric vibration which we hear. It is the original power of vibration. It is the undifferentiated Life-power, the source of all other manifestations. For this unmanifest reality we can frame no adequate definition. To us it seems to be No-Thing, or we find ourselves thinking of it as being perfectly empty space. This is why the sages of India say the fundamental quality of *Akasha* is pure space. Because space is omnipresent, they

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teach also that *Akasha* is all-pervading.

Rama Prasad says: "The *Akasha* is the most important of all the *Tattvas*. It must; as a matter of course, precede and follow every change of state on every plane of life. Without this, there can be no manifestation or cessation of forms. *It is out of Akasha that every form comes, and it is in Akasha that every form lives.* The *Akasha* is full of forms in their potential state. It intervenes between every two of the five *Tattvas*.

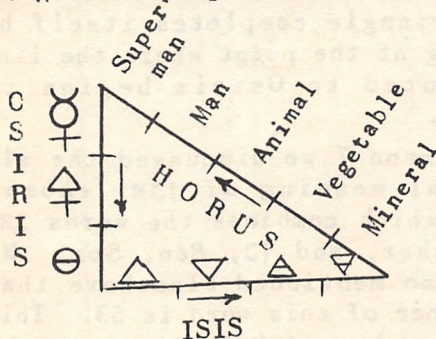
Here, by the way, is a hint for Tarot students as to the place of the Fool in the whole series of major trumps. Just as 0 is the logical predecessor of 1, so, in the Tarot pack, the Fool precedes the Magician, numbered 1. The power the Fool represents is, however, that which precedes every number, and follows every number also. Between every two numbers there is the zero, so that what is to be understood by the series, 1, 2, 3, 4, is really 0, 1, 0, 2, 0, 3, 0, 4, 0--and so on, through all extensions of the series. It is noteworthy, also, that the zero sign, an oval, is the Hindu symbol for *Akasha*.

Many symbols refer to the idea that the First Matter is "one,

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which is also three, four and five.''
Among them is the Great Pyramid, one structure, representing by its triangular faces the number *three*, by its square base the number *four*, and by its apex and four corners (also its sides and base) the number *five*. The apron worn by Freemasons, and similar aprons worn in other ceremonial organizations based on the Western Tradition, are also symbols of unity, representing the number *three* by a triangular flap, the number *four* by the square shape of the aprons themselves, and the number *five* by the four corners of the square apron and the fifth point the apex of the triangular flap.

Yet another symbol of the First Matter and of the Great Work is the celebrated Pythagorean triangle, sacred to Osiris, Isis and Horus, having these proportions:



In this triangle the figure itself is the *One*, representing the all-pervading First Matter. The verti-

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cal line, descending, is that of Osiris, the Father, and its divisions are attributed to the three principles, Mercury, Sulphur and Salt. The horizontal line is that corresponding to Isis, and has four units, representing the elements fire, water, air and earth. The ascending hypotenuse, corresponding to Horus, the Son, contains five units, and shows the five stages in the development of the Life-power's manifestation.

The first stage is that of the mineral. Then comes the plant. After the plant is the animal. Above the animal is the natural man. Above the natural man is the man who has made himself the subject of the Great Work, he who is adept, master and magus. He completes the Great Work by becoming one with the Father, even as the line of Horus in this triangle completes itself by arriving at the point where the line attributed to Osiris begins to descend.

In Lesson 7 we discussed the alchemical meaning of אבן, *ehben*, Stone, which combines the words אב, *Ab*, Father, and בן, *Ben*, Son. We have also mentioned elsewhere that the number of this word is 53. This is the number of חמם, *khammaw*, the Hebrew poetical name for "Sun."

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The same number, 53, is that designating the degrees formed by the angle of the Pythagorean triangle where the hypotenuse, ascribed to Horus, joins the vertical line ascribed to Osiris. Thus, on this triangle, the number 53 defines the union of the Son, Horus, with the Father, Osiris. That is, Osiris is אב, Ab, and Horus is בן, Ben. Both are solar deities.

Since the angular relationship between the hypotenuse and the vertical line is 53 degrees, the angle formed by the base and the hypotenuse must necessarily be one of 37 degrees, inasmuch as the three interior angles of any triangle always total 180 degrees, and in this triangle, the angle between the vertical line and the base is a right angle, or angle of 90 degrees.

The angular relation of the hypotenuse to the base is always that of 37 degrees, at any point on the hypotenuse. And at any point on the hypotenuse the angle in relation to the vertical line is always 53 degrees. The relation of the evolving forms of the Life-power to Mother Nature, whence those forms rise, is always the same. The same laws and forces are at work in the stone as in the perfect master. The differ-

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ences are differences in form, in range of expression. In the stone, the direction or impulse of those laws and forces is also the same as it is in the master. All the forces of nature move together toward the perfect union of the Son with the Father, and toward the perfect union, also, of the powers of the Father and the Mother in the manifestation of the Son.

Thus the Pythagorean triangle is a summary of the fundamentals of alchemy, showing the descent of Spirit into Nature as the cause of the ascent of consciousness through five great stages, back to perfect identification with the Primal Source. It may be too much to say that the ancient Egyptians had alchemy in mind when they adopted this triangle as a symbol for their Holy Family. We merely point out that this triangle was used by alchemists to summarize their doctrine, because its mathematical properties are such that it lends itself easily to such symbolic interpretation.

